

# Constraints of Creativity

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**CIDRAL**

The Centre for  
Interdisciplinary  
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## A Cultural History of Business in the Middle Ages: Themes, Approaches and Sources

Roundtable

18 April, 5-7 P.M.

Room A104, Samuel Alexander Building

Co-organised by CIDRAL and Manchester Enterprise Centre

Business history to date has concerned itself with the growth and development of firms and business systems over time and their interactions with wider social, political, and cultural contexts. Yet business, whether or not identified with the firm, is also embedded in social and cultural systems and structures, from which it derives much of its legitimacy and potency and on which it has a powerful shaping force. Attitudes towards the conduct of business can reveal a society's priorities with regard to such critical issues as the creation and distribution of wealth, the organization of production and exchange, and the distribution of power amongst social, political, economic, and cultural institutions.

This roundtable moves the study of business history away from a focus on the firm and its activities and towards a broader definition that encompasses a range of activities and practices embedded within systems of value and social and institutional structures. This is particularly appropriate for the middle ages, when business was usually conducted by independent merchants rather than by firms.

The roundtable also launches the edited volume 'A Cultural History of Business in the Middle Ages: Themes, Approaches and Sources', part of a 6 volume set commissioned by Bloomsbury under the direction of Prof Andrew Popp and edited by Georg Christ and Catherine Casson. Two contributors to the volume will present their work. Dr Bart Lambert (University of York) will discuss how merchants shaped, and were shaped by, the distribution of power. Dr Deborah Thorpe (Trinity College, Dublin) will examine the business opportunities that emerged with the growth of written records and how the production and exchange of such records was organised.